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Sustainability & Environment

College of Arts & Sciences

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## **Presidents' Joint Committee on Sustainability**

Department of Sustainability, University of South Dakota

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# Presidents' Joint Committee on Sustainability

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## Committee Charge

- Define sustainability as it relates to the USD campus
- Develop and recommend goals for USD
- Review and recommend projects and initiatives to enhance sustainability
- Develop and recommend a sustainability implementation plan
- Develop and recommend a sustainability assessment plan
- Review and recommend mechanisms to incorporate sustainability into curricula across campus
- Present a report on the above to USD administration and the Student Government Association

A special thanks to the committee members who spent the past three months reviewing and discussing what sustainability should look like at the University of South Dakota. While the work is just beginning, it goes without saying that their insights were invaluable as we move sustainability forward at USD.

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## Defining Sustainability

*Sustainability is the social practice of responsibly promoting a world that is environmentally beneficial and socially just both now and into the future. As global citizens, residents along the Missouri River, and members of the Vermillion community, the faculty, students, and staff of the University of South Dakota are committed to sustainability in our curriculum, research, campus operations, and community.*

USD is committed to making sustainability a priority. USD is located on an attractive 274-acre campus in Vermillion, a small community nestled along the bluffs above the Missouri River in the southeast corner of South Dakota. This definition from our website set the stage for our committee as we discussed what sustainability should be at USD.

Sustainability is a complex topic and has many different interpretations. Because of the diversity of ways to understand sustainability, it is necessary for USD to define what sustainability means to us in order to move towards a more sustainable campus and community. We believe that having a clear vision for sustainability will have a positive impact on USD, including our students, faculty, staff, and the physical environment, and the Vermillion community.

# Sustainability Goals

We are committed to integrating sustainability into our curriculum, research, campus operations, and community, and our goals reflect these priorities.

**Curriculum:** Integrate sustainability into all phases of educational and co-curricular experience.

As the flagship, liberal arts university in the state, we believe that it is important for all USD graduates to be sustainability literate, which is a goal that has been adopted by peer institutions.

**Research:** Promote research that advances the understanding and practice of sustainability.

Sustainability-focused research is an area of opportunity for USD sustainability. Our committee believes that financially supporting and publicly encouraging sustainability research advances the University's strategic plan of expanding interdisciplinary research, scholarship, and creative work.

**Operations:** Create the mindset and infrastructure to establish sustainability on campus.

This area holds critical projects for building both support for and visibility of sustainability at USD, and this area impacts to our financial well-being. Sustainability in facilities management, such as efficient energy use, generally saves money and is a focus of the South Dakota Board of Regents. But we believe that our sustainability efforts should extend beyond management of infrastructure to include all operations including faculty and staff mindsets and behaviors.

**Community:** Unite campus and community through sustainable practices.

USD is a major component of Vermillion, yet sometimes the campus is seen as a separate entity from the larger Vermillion community. We believe that our sustainability efforts should extend beyond the campus and act as a tool that brings both the on-campus and off-campus communities together for the greater good of our community.

# Sustainability Initiatives

The committee discussed multiple initiatives and then categorized them into three different levels. Foundational initiatives are those that must be completed first in order to identify, measure, and communicate key metrics/indicators of current sustainability efforts at USD. Priority initiatives are those that we believe should be the first priority within each of the goal categories: curriculum, research, operations, and community. We also included other initiatives that were discussed, but not prioritized as the most important for the initial success of the sustainability efforts at USD.

## Foundational Initiatives

**Sustainability Engagement Index:** Conduct surveys to measure levels of awareness, knowledge, valuation, and behavior related to sustainability at USD. Identify aspects of campus sustainability that are most important to USD faculty, students, and staff.

**STARS (Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System) Participation:** Conduct a baseline assessment of current campus sustainability using STARS, which is a transparent, self-reporting framework for colleges and universities to measure their sustainability performance. We recommend strategically choosing select credits within STARS that will serve as key indicators for our efforts going forwards. These indicators will allow us to compare how USD is performing versus our peers.

**Sustainability Website Creation:** Develop a website for sustainability efforts at USD. The site should serve as the central location for campus sustainability including the vision statement, goals, progress towards current initiatives, success stories, and feedback.

## Priority Initiatives

**Curriculum Initiative:** Coursework shall include a sustainability component.

**Research Initiative:** Create mechanism to convey sustainability research opportunities to interested researchers.

**Operations Initiative:** Develop a recycling program not run by volunteers including hiring outside personnel, restructuring existing positions, or incorporating recycling into co-curricular learning with appropriate funding.

**Community Initiative:** Provide education and training for the community with emphasis on quality of life and fostering future opportunities for the community's youth.

# Initiatives for Future Consideration

## **Curriculum Initiatives:**

- Create a study group within the Dean's Council and/or faculty governance groups to define integration of sustainability into all academic fields of study
- Add more sustainability related courses and evaluate existing courses for sustainability content
- Provide grants to faculty to enhance the incorporation of sustainability into the curriculum
- Provide green consulting to all students on how to consume fewer resources

## **Research Initiatives:**

- Work with the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs to compile and advertise grants focused on sustainability (external)
- Professionally value sustainability research from faculty and students
  - Sustainability research should be valued for tenure and promotion
  - Provides incentives for students
- Provide research grants (e.g. U. Discover or faculty grants) for sustainability needs (internal)

## **Operations Initiatives:**

- Report on resource use and sustainability considerations for new research
- Establish campus housing beginning and end-of-year waste diversion program
- Have an Office of Sustainability
- Become a carbon neutral campus
- Offer sustainability training for new employee
- Develop a campus energy efficiency strategy and promote the use of renewable resources
- Develop a sustainable purchasing policy
- Collect information about USD sustainability efforts to date: energy savings, recycling, green buildings, etc.
- Establish a baseline for all waste materials collected on the USD campus

## **Community Initiatives:**

- Create a pedestrian and bike friendly community
- Partner with the USD Barking Dogs cycling club to promote bicycling safety
- Increase Earth Days events
- Help initiate end-of-school-year donating (external)



# Implementation & Assessment Plan

Our committee is proud of the work that we have done with this report, but we view the implementation of this plan as the most critical. Below is an outline with tentative dates for how to begin implementation of the sustainability initiatives listed in this report.

## **May 2015 – August 2015: Develop a sustainability website**

Our committee believes that our sustainability definition, goals, and future initiatives related to sustainability should be on a USD website. This would increase the transparency of our sustainability efforts and would assist recruiting both faculty and students to USD who value sustainability. The goal is to have the website live in August 2015.

## **June 2015 – December 2015: Sustainability engagement index and STARS participation**

We recommend that USD should begin utilizing the STARS assessment tool including identifying key indicators and establishing benchmarks for those indicators. We further recommend that USD conduct sustainability engagement surveys to measure levels of awareness, knowledge, valuation, and behavior related to sustainability at USD. A priority of the surveys should be on USD faculty, students, and staff, but expanding the survey to include the non-campus community would be desirable.

## **August 2015 – April 2016: Recycling Program Task Force**

We recommend establishing a Recycling Program Task Force to determine what the cost and operational structure of a successful recycling program might look like at USD. Our committee did not feel comfortable making a recommendation in this area without more data and information about establishing a centralized recycling program at USD.